

Attributions of Blame in Sexual Harassment Incidents

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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May 6, 1994

May 7, 1994

ABSTRACT

Perceptions of culpability in situations in which a male professor engages in sexual harassment of a female student were studied. Specifically, the influence of subject gender, latency of reporting, and severity of harassment on subjects' perceptions of sexual harassment was studied. Introductory psychology students (186 females, 106 males) read one of twelve vignettes and then completed a two-part questionnaire on their perceptions of the situation portrayed in the vignette. A 2 X 3 x 4 between-subjects factorial analysis was performed. As hypothesized, subject gender and severity of harassment significantly affected perceptions of sexual harassment. Females viewed the incidents more negatively than did males. Subjects viewed harassment incidents of greater severity more negatively than those incidents of less severity. Latency of reporting did not appear to affect subjects' perceptions of sexual harassment.

Attribution of Blame in Sexual Harassment Incidents

Sexual harassment is demanding increasing attention from lawyers, employers, and researchers. Debate has ensued over its definition and prevalence. Sexual harassment has been defined in many ways. Most will agree however, that sexual harassment, "includes a wide range of behaviors existing between sexual innuendoes at inappropriate times to coerced sexual relationships" (Hotelling, 1991). Sexist remarks and leers are examples of behaviors still not categorized, although "gender harassment" has been suggested as a term identifying this type of verbal harassment and abuse (Hotelling, 1991). Further complicating a consensus on definition is the tendency for perceptions of sexual harassment to change according to the age, gender, or status (e.g. student vs. employee) of the victim (Baker, Terpestra, & Cutler 1990; Kenig & Ryan, 1986). The legal definition, stated in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, defines sexual harassment as "unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that are connected

to decisions about employment or that create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment" (Workman & Johnson, 1991).

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination that is usually divided into two categories. The first category is quid pro quo, or "this for that". Quid pro quo is a bargain arrangement, and a single incident may be sufficient to evoke the label "sexual harassment". For example, an employee may be offered a promotion in exchange for sexual intercourse. In this situation, there is unwelcome sexual attention and the "victim must comply sexually or forfeit an employment benefit" (Curcio & Milford, 1993, p. 57). A second type of sexual harassment is labeled hostile environment; this category consists of "sexual behavior that creates an intimidating, offensive, or hostile work environment" (Williams & Cyr, 1992, p. 48). The victim must show not only that the behavior in question was unwelcome, but also that "a pattern or accumulation of behavior" occurred. Examples of this behavior include posting nude photos in the office, requesting an employee to

remove coins from ones pants' pocket, or persisting in attempts for a date. The defining aspect of this form of sexual harassment is repetition.

The prevalence of sexual harassment fluctuates, depending on which research study one consults. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the number of sexual harassment complaints increased from 4,272 in 1981 to 7,273 in 1985. Empirical investigation of sexual harassment in university settings suggest that fifteen to thirty-five percent of female college students experience sexual harassment (Kenig & Ryan, 1986). Paludi (1990) states that thirty percent of female students are harassed by at least one professor during their four years in college, despite the fact that Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments prohibits sexual discrimination against students. Also, graduate students appear to be at a much greater risk than undergraduates (Hotelling, 1991). Terpestra and Baker (1987) suggest forty-two percent to ninety percent of women have encountered sexual harassment in the work place. Similarly, Curcio and Milford (1993) reported

that nearly fifty percent of the females in the federal workplace had experienced sexual harassment. Hotelling (1991), by averaging across populations, suggested a "conservative" estimate of 20% to 30% of females as victims of sexual harassment. If gender harassment is included, the number rises to almost 70% (Paludi, 1990). When considering the myriad of negative effects linked to sexual harassment and the steadily increasing estimates of the number of victims involved, sexual harassment appears to have reached an alarming rate.

Effects

Despite the varying definitions of sexual harassment, there is general agreement that sexual harassment can be very detrimental to the victim. Harassment affects an individual's emotional state, physical well-being, and behavior. Most victims immediately experience psychological symptoms consistent with the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (Paludi, 1990). Often the victim of such an offense feels disbelief, shock, doubt, anger, fear, depression, and self-blame (Hotelling, 1991).

Physical complications include insomnia, headaches, binge-eating, anxiety attacks, nausea, and digestive problems. The victim is also likely to make various behavioral changes as a means of coping. These behaviors include "dressing down, avoiding the harasser, dropping a class, and changing majors" (Hotelling, 1991, p. 500). Occupational changes include absenteeism, distraction, and loss of motivation (Jensen & Gutek, 1982). In short, sexual harassment may have harmful consequences in multiple aspects of the victim's life.

There are three prevailing theoretical models of sexual harassment. The organizational model states that the hierarchical structures of institutions provide unequal amounts of power and authority which enable sexual and gender harassment to occur. This model suggests that in work institutions "characterized by vertical stratification, individuals can use their power and position to extort sexual gratification from their subordinates" (Paludi, 1990, p. 8). According to the sociocultural model, sexual harassment is a by-product of a generally male-dominant society. This model

contends that gender is the ultimate predictor of likelihood of sexual harassment, with females always being most vulnerable. The biological model views sexual harassment as a natural tendency for people to act on their sexual attractions to one another (Paludi, 1990).

Despite the disagreement over its definition, individuals must still cope with sexual harassment and its negative effects. Victims of sexual harassment, like victims of other negative events, often face the brunt of the blame (Burt & Estep, 1981; Doughty & Schneider, 1987; McCaul, Veltum, Boyechko, & Crawford, 1990). Several concepts have been developed to explain why victims are perceived as blameworthy. Two of these concepts, the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis and the Just World Theory, suggest that observers are motivated by a need to create a sense of control and protection in the individuals (McCaul, et al., 1990). Therefore, individuals may attribute high blame to victims of sexual harassment who are dissimilar from themselves in order to preserve their sense of safety.

The Defensive Attribution Hypothesis suggests that

"we alter blame attributions to avoid the inference that negative events can befall us" (McCaul, et al., 1990, p. 2). The more similar a person is to the victim the less blame that individual will assign to the victim. Conversely, a victim who is very different from the individual will be assigned high blame. The Just World Theory describes the heuristic that "bad things happen to bad people". Therefore, nothing bad will happen to good people. By maintaining this schema, an individual is reduces his/her fear of negative events (Branscombe & Weir, 1992; Burt & Estep, 1981; McCaul et al., 1990).

Shaver's defensive notion (Jensen & Gutek, 1982) may also help to explain why victims of sexual harassment are viewed as blameworthy. This notion suggests that individuals experience "harm avoidance" and "blame avoidance". Harm avoidance occurs when a sexual harassment situation has low personal relevance. The individual assigns high personal responsibility to the accuser as a means of distancing him/herself. Blame avoidance occurs when the incident has high personal

relevance, and the individual assigns low responsibility to the victim. Jensen and Gutek (1982) investigated workers' perceptions of blame in sexual harassment, and found that males attributed more responsibility to the victim than did females. The authors suggest that this tendency can be explained most readily by Shaver's defensive notion (Jensen & Gutek, 1982). Females are most often the victims of sexual harassment, so females would be expected to identify highly with the incident and assign low responsibility to the victim. Conversely, males would find the harassment incident to have low personal relevance, and accordingly, they assign high responsibility to the victim.

Sexual harassment has become an area of interest in psychological research. Multiple factors have been found to influence perceptions of harassing behavior and attributions of blame for sexual harassment, including escalating commitment to a relationship, history of romance, cosmetics usage, and gender (Summers & Mykelbust, 1992; Williams & Cyr, 1992; Workman & Johnson, 1991).

Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

When questioning individuals about typical sexual harassment incidents in the workplace, Popovich, Jolton, Mastrangelo, Everton, and Somers (1993) found evidence supporting the contention that gender differences exist in this area. Female subjects perceived power to be a key factor, whereas males perceived the incident to be the result of sexual attraction (Popovich, et al., 1993).

Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, and DeLuca (1992) suggested that sexual harassment is one component of a broader attitude of misogyny. Participants in this study reported their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors concerning AIDS, dating, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. The results suggested that men were significantly more tolerant of sexual harassment, more likely to subscribe to rape myths, and more likely to believe heterosexual relationships are adversarial than were females. That is, males were more likely to view heterosexual relationships as exploitative and manipulative than were females.

Female college students have been found to have a lower tolerance for sexual harassment than male college students (Kenig & Ryan, 1986; McKinney, 1992). Most females also viewed romances between co-workers as less appropriate than did males, with the exception of undergraduate females. Undergraduate females were accepting of such co-worker relationships "with professors who did not have direct authority, and with teaching assistants, regardless of their authority" (Kenig & Ryan, 1986, p. 541). However, in another study, Terpestra and Baker (1987) found gender differences in perceptions on sexual harassment only in incidents involving coarse language, with significantly more females considering this type of behavior harassment.

Marks and Nelson (1993) investigated students' perceptions of potentially harassing behaviors instigated by faculty members and directed towards students. Both faculty and student gender were manipulated, as well as severity of harassment. Female subjects viewed the faculty members' behaviors as less appropriate than did male subjects. Contrary to the authors' hypothesis

and previous similar research, female subjects did not subtle forms of harassment as more inappropriate than did male subjects. Subjects' perceptions of harassment did not significantly differ as a function of faculty gender. That is, student perceptions of harassment by a faculty member do not appear to be influenced by the perpetrator's gender.

Few studies have investigated contrapower harassment, which occurs when a student harasses a faculty member. McKinney (1992) studied faculty perceptions of harassment and found that incidents of alleged harassment were affected by the gender of the perpetrator. If the perpetrator was a male student, faculty members generally believed that the behavior constituted harassment, the faculty member would be upset, and the student was responsible (McKinney, 1992, . 627). Therefore, faculty perceptions of harassment by a student appear to be influenced by the perpetrator's gender.

Grauerholz (1989) investigated contrapower harassment of female faculty by their students. Female

faculty respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to determine the prevalence of specific types of harassing behavior, the extent to which these behaviors were viewed as harassment by the respondents, and the type of actions taken to address the situation.

Grauerholz's findings suggested that contrapower sexual harassment may or may not include anonymous behaviors by the perpetrators, such as obscene phone calls or defacing property (Grauerholz, 1989). Respondents were increasingly likely to view behaviors as harassing as they became "more severe and less ambiguous" (Grauerholz, 1989, p. 794). For example, whereas only 44% of respondents felt sexist comments directed at a faculty member by a student constituted harassment, 96% felt sexual assault did warrant the label "harassment". The perpetrator's intent was also a factor in the respondent's determining whether the behavior constituted harassment. Female faculty respondents maintained that some of the behaviors are due to lack of education, need for attention, or cultural

differences, and should not be construed as harassment. Previous experience with harassment did not affect respondents' evaluation of the present behavior. That is, those respondents who had previously experienced harassing behavior were no more likely to view the current scenario as harassment than those respondents who had not previously experienced harassing behavior.

Male students were found to be more likely than female students to instigate potentially harassing behavior towards female faculty. Both the victim's gender and status were found to contribute to the likelihood of being the object of sexual harassment. Females are more likely than males to be sexually harassed. Gender may continue to be a factor in the incidence of sexual harassment due to physical and cultural power inequalities between males and females, with females usually occupying the lower end of the spectrum. Individuals of a lower status, who often also tend to be female, appear to be more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Indeed, Grauerholz (1989) found that female students were two or three times more likely

to experience potentially harassing behavior than were female faculty members.

In conclusion, contrapower sexual harassment appears to occur in university settings, with female faculty as frequent victims. Although male students may not hold formal professional power over female faculty, they may possess power via physical intimidation and culturally sanctioned dominance. Societal inequalities may perpetuate a tendency for males to view themselves as entitled to powerful positions and breed contempt for females who also hold these statuses.

Attributions of Blame

Individuals often vary in their interpretations of social interactions. For example, what one person considers a friendly gesture may be perceived by another as a sexual advancement. As increasingly amicable behavior progresses, the relationship between the two individuals is said to be escalating. Williams and Cyr (1992) found that gender and escalating commitment to a relationship interact to influence perceptions of blame for sexual harassment. In instances of sexual

harassment, males tended to assign decreasing blame to the perpetrator as the victim's level of commitment to the relationship increased. Females assigned consistent levels of blame to the perpetrator regardless of the amount of commitment. These investigators have suggested that males focus more on the victim's behavior, and females direct attention to the perpetrator's actions. In other words, males appear to consider the victim's previous social interactions with the perpetrator when assigning blame. In contrast, females tended to focus on the incident in question, not on previous interactions, when attributing blame to the perpetrator.

In conflict with Williams and Cyr's (1992) gender-based perception interpretation were the assignments of blame to the accused. Females' assignments of blame directly increased with the harasser's level of commitment to the relationship. Conversely, males retained a consistent level of attribution of blame to the harasser across all escalating conditions.

Summers and Myklebust (1992) studied the effects of a history of romance between two parties involved in a sexual harassment complaint. Previous romantic involvement between the two parties was significantly correlated with higher assignments of blame to the victim by both males and females. The results also showed that females viewed the victim as significantly less blameworthy than did males. In addition, the participants felt a history of romance between the perpetrator and the victim necessitated a stronger negative response from the victim towards the perpetrator to be acknowledged as resistance. The authors suggested that the perpetrator's previous romantic involvement with the victim "legitimized" the perpetrator's subsequent social-sexual behaviors (Summers & Myklebust, 1992, p. 354).

The role of cosmetics in attributions concerning sexual harassment was investigated by Workman and Johnson (1991). These researchers found that a confederate wearing a high or moderate amount of cosmetics was believed to be significantly more likely to provoke

sexual harassment and to be sexually harassed than the same confederate wearing no make-up. In other words, a female complainant may be assigned more blame in a sexual harassment incident based merely on the amount of cosmetics she is wearing, regardless of her actions. Existing data show that a female wearing heavy or moderate cosmetics was rated as less moral than the same female wearing no cosmetics. The investigators contend that their results may be attributed to sex-role spillover. That is, there may be a "carry-over into the workplace of gender-based expectations for behaviors that are irrelevant or inappropriate to work" (Workman & Johnson, 1991, p. 761) Cosmetics may be misconstrued as inviting sexual advances.

Blaming the victim of sexual harassment may be a process similar to blaming the victim of rape. Both sexual harassment and rape are thought to be power motivated, the victims of both are usually female, and the psychological effects of harassment and rape are similar. Therefore, findings from the rape literature may generalize to incidents of sexual harassment.

Burt and Estep (1981) studied the social role of the rape victim and contend that society is very guarded in awarding the label "victim". These investigators suggest that society tends to discount the victim's account by saying (1) the victim is lying, (2) the incident was consensual, (3) the incident happened, but no harm was done, and (4) the incident was victim-precipitated. Individuals often cited prior romantic involvement or sexual experience with the accused as evidence of consent. Cann, Calhoun, and Selby (1979) found that when subjects were asked to make judgments about rape, the amount of sexual activity the victim was alleged to have had, and who provided the information were important factors. For instance, if the victim refuses to testify regarding previous sexual experience, a high level of responsibility is assigned to the victim. However, if the judge refused to allow the same information as admissible, the victim was assign low responsibility.

Resistance appears to influence blameworthiness of victims of rape. Branscombe and Weir (1992) studied

attributions of responsibility in rape cases. An interesting curvilinear relationship between the amount of resistance and the blame assigned was discovered. Low blame was assigned to the victim displaying a moderate amount of resistance, but high blame was assigned to the victim displaying low or high resistance. These researchers proposed that high resistance behavior is stereotype-inconsistent and triggers attributional processing. Therefore, these findings support the counter-intuitive concept of resisting "too much". The victim may be blamed not only for precipitating the rape incident, but also for applying either too little or too much resistance during the act itself. These results may be relevant to evaluations of blame in sexual harassment cases, with the victim who reacts to strenuously or too quickly being assigned high blame.

Reporting

Although the effects of harassment may be devastating, many incidents go unreported. Victims often develop coping methods, such as changing their behavior, in hopes of curtailing unwanted attention.

The individual's "confusion over what constitutes sexual harassment, willingness to blame him/herself, and fear of reprisal" may all contribute to a delay in or lack of reporting (Paludi, 1990, p. 80). The confusion over what defines sexual harassment is easily understandable, especially given the disagreement among professionals on this very issue. Victims often consider themselves to blame because of the traditional view of victims as losers (Paludi, 1990). Victims often attribute the incident to a personal characterological fault, instead of a personal behavioral fault. That is, the individual blames an inherent part of the self, rather than a particular action for the harassment (Shaver & Drown, 1986). An individual will sometimes fail to report harassment due to a fear of job or income loss. Also, if the outcome of a formal charge of harassment is belief in the accused, this can further demoralize the victim (Paludi, 1990).

Brooks and Perot (1991) found that the perceived offensiveness of the behavior increased the likelihood of reporting. Feminist ideology, or pro-feminist

attitudes, influenced perceived offensiveness.

Individuals with pro-feminist attitudes applied the label sexual harassment to a broader range of incidents and were less likely to blame the victim. The frequency of the behavior also effected perceived offensiveness, with repeated harassing behaviors found to be more offensive.

Even if a victim decides to report an incident of sexual harassment, it may take time to reach this decision. A delay in reporting may prove to be detrimental to the victim. Williams, Sefkow, Truax, Manley, Forsythe (1993, p. 2) suggested that "failure on the part of the victim to respond immediately to the perpetrator's behavior may by its ambiguity convey doubt as to the victim's acquiescence". That is, latency in responding by the victim may be seen as evidence of the victim's willingness to comply with the incident. Paludi (1990, p. 80) describes four stages a victim will usually work through; they are (1) confusion/self-blame, (2) fear/anxiety, (3) depression/anger, and (4) disillusionment. It is not

surprising that "considerable time often elapsed before many [victims] realized the wrongness of the perpetrator's behavior and acknowledged their status as legitimate victims" (Paludi, 1990, p. 76). It follows that individuals may not report an incident of harassment until they actually view themselves as victims.

Prior research shows that sexual harassment incidents, despite serious psychological consequences for the victim, often go unreported. Reporting itself may be construed as a form of resistance for the victims of sexual harassment as it appears to be in judgments of blame in rape situations (Branscombe & Weir, 1992).

Based on the curvilinear relationship found for resistance in the rape literature, reporting as a form of resistance in incidents of sexual harassment appears to be an area worthy of investigation as well. When such incidents are reported, many factors contribute to assessing the amount of blame attributed to the victim of sexual harassment and/or rape, including escalating commitment to the relationship, cosmetics usage, previous

history of romance, gender, type of harassment, and level of resistance.

Previous research in the rape literature has documented the effects of varying amounts of resistance on attributions of blame directed toward the victim. However, the effects of the timing of such resistance on attributions of blame has yet to be considered. It is this aspect of reporting as a means of resistance that the present research investigated. Branscombe and Weir (1992) found that moderate resistance by the rape victim resulted in the lowest assignment of blame to the victim. Counter-intuitively, a high level of blame was assigned to the victim displaying both low and high levels of resistance.

The present study evaluated college students' perceptions of the victim, the perpetrator, and of blame in an incident of sexual harassment. Latency of reporting was varied as was severity of harassing behavior. Based on previous research, a curvilinear relationship between latency in reporting and attributions of blame is hypothesized for incidents

of sexual harassment. An immediate report may be viewed as a high form of resistance, with high attribution of blame towards the victim expected. Intermediate delays in reporting may be seen as moderate levels of resistance, with low attributions of blame towards the victim expected. A prolonged delay in reporting may be viewed as low resistance, with high attributions of blame towards the victim expected. It was also hypothesized that as severity of harassment behavior increased, so would attribution of blame to the perpetrator. Additionally, females were expected to view incidents as more harassing, to view the victim more positively, and to view the perpetrator more negatively than were males.

Method

Subjects

Two-hundred and ninety-two (186 females, 106 males) undergraduates enrolled in Introductory Psychology courses at Ball State University participated in this study. Participants were predominately white and native English speakers. The vast majority of subjects were

eighteen to nineteen years old. Twenty-three to twenty-five subjects were assigned randomly to each of twelve conditions. Subjects received experimental participation credit for their participation. An attempt was made to equate gender balance across the cells of the design, resulting in approximately seven to twelve males and thirteen to seventeen females in each cell.

Design

A between-subjects, 2 x 3 x 4 factorial design was used. Three variables were manipulated in this study. The first was subject gender. The second, severity of harassment behavior, had three levels (low severity = bantering; medium severity = request for a date; high severity = fondling). The third variable, latency of reporting, had four levels (same day; later in the semester; later in the year; a few years after graduation). These manipulations resulted in twelve separate conditions for each gender.

Procedure

Participants were tested in groups of thirty or fewer, with both a male and a female researcher present.

Participation took approximately 30 minutes. Subjects completed an informed consent statement and then read one of twelve vignettes that described an interaction between a student, "Allison", and a faculty member, "Dr. N" (see Appendix A). After reading the vignette, participants were asked to complete Part I (see Appendix B) of the questionnaire. Part I contained questions about perceptions of each party involved in the incident, as well as demographic information (i.e. gender, age, and race/ethnicity). Participants responded using a seven-point Likert-type scale on each item. When they finished, participants were asked to turn in Part I to one of the investigators. The investigator then gave the participants the second part of the questionnaire. Part II was comprised of the following open-ended questions on perceptions of and possible alternatives to the vignette, along with more demographics (i.e. major and GPA).

Please comment briefly on what happened in the scenario you just read about. What do you think about the situation? What do you think about the behavior of the two parties in the situation?

Is there anything that you think Allison could have done to reduce the unwanted behaviors that she experienced in Dr. N's office? If so, please describe what you think she could have done.

Are there any additional comments that you wish to make about the scenario or the behavior of the two parties involved?

Results

The results of Part II of the questionnaire were not considered for the present study. Responses to each of the questions were analyzed separately, resulting in fourteen dependent variables. A 4 (latency of reporting) by 3 (severity of harassment) by 2 (gender of subject) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the results for each dependent variable. Post hoc tests used when main effects or interactions reached significance. The Tukey/ Kramer method was used to interpret differences in severity. Variables meeting the $p < .05$ significance level will be discussed here.

No significant differences were found between groups on items six, eight, eleven, or thirteen (see Appendix B). Latency of reporting did not appear to significantly influence any of the items. No significant three-way interactions were obtained in this study.

Subject gender affected item four. Males ($\bar{M}=1.70$) were significantly more likely than females ($\bar{M}=1.35$) to view Allison

as responsible for the incident ($F(1, 268) = 9.27$, $p < .001$).

A significant main effect was found for severity on item three. The subjects' confidence of their judgments increased with severity of harassment ($F(2, 268) = 4.03$, $p = .02$). Each of the severity levels significantly differed from the others ($Q = 3.56$, 3.63 , and 7.17 , respectively).

Insert Table 1 about here

Items two, seven, nine, eleven, twelve, and fourteen (see Tables 2-7) each produced significant main effects for both gender and severity. Perceptions of the incident as sexual harassment (question 2) were less frequent for males than females ($F(1, 268) = 10.23$, $p < .001$). Increased severity of harassment also resulted in increased perceptions of sexual harassment ($F(2, 268) = 29.66$, $p < .001$). The most severe (fondling) condition resulted in significantly greater values than both the least

severe (bantering) and the intermediate (direct comment) conditions ($\bar{Q} = 10.23$ and 8.60 , respectively).

Insert Tables 2-7 about here

Dr. N was believed to be the type to engage in harassing behavior (question 7) by females more than by males ($F(1, 268) = 6.95, p < .001$). Additionally, as the degree of severity increased, Dr. N was more likely to be seen as the type to engage in harassing behavior ($F(2, 268) = 6.15, p < .001$). Post hoc analysis revealed that the fondling condition was significantly greater than both the bantering and the direct comment conditions ($\bar{Q} = 4.51, 4.32$).

Allison was less believable (question 9) to males than to females ($F(1, 268) = 14.48, p < .001$). Additionally, Allison's believability increased with severity of harassment ($F(2, 268) = 7.31, p < .001$). The bantering condition was significantly less than the fondling condition ($\bar{Q} = 5.55$).

When assigning Dr. N's penalty (question 10), males reacted less negatively than did females ($F(1, 268) = 7.34, p < .001$). As the severity of sexual harassment increased, so did the penalty proposed by subjects for Dr. N, $F(2, 268) = 34.41, p < .001$. This main effect was accounted for by higher scores on the fondling condition than either the bantering or direct comment conditions ($Q = 11.33, 8.53$).

Males were significantly less upset by Dr. N's behavior (question 12) than were females ($F(1, 268) = 20.46, p < .001$). Subjects reported more dismay as the severity of harassment increases ($F(2, 268) = 16.43, p < .001$). The fondling condition produced significantly higher values than the bantering and the direct comment conditions ($Q = 7.78, 6.26$).

Evaluations of the offensiveness of Dr. N's behavior (question 14) was also influenced by gender, with males viewing the incident as less offensive than females ($F(1, 268) = 12.55, p < .001$). Dr. N's behavior was perceived to be more offensive as the severity of harassment increased ($F(2, 268) =$

27.67,

$p < .001$). The fondling condition resulted in significantly higher values than the bantering and the direct comment conditions ($Q = 10.24, 7.65$).

Question one (Dr. N responsibility) produced significant main effects for severity ($F(2, 268) = 4.03, p = .019$) and gender ($F(1, 268) = 9.27, p = .003$) and a significant interaction between severity and sex ($F(2, 268) = 4.64, p = .010$). However, a significant interaction qualified these main effects. Post hoc analysis of the severity by gender interaction using the Tukey/Kramer method revealed that the bantering condition produced significantly lower values than both the direct comment and fondling conditions. Additionally, females ($M = 6.74$) and males ($M = 5.72$) differed significantly only in the direct comment condition.

Insert Table 8 about here

Question five (Dr. N intent) indicated that

severity of harassment significantly influenced perceptions of whether sexual harassment occurred ($F(2, 268) = 15.72, p < .001$). Furthermore, severity interacted with gender significantly ($F(2, 268) = 4.26, p = .015$). Further analysis of this interaction indicated that both males and females appeared to view each condition as significantly different from the others. However, only in the direct comment condition were the male values lower than the female values.

Insert Table 9 about here

Discussion

The present study investigated perceptions of vignettes involving a male professor sexually harassing a female student as a function of severity of harassment, subject gender, and latency of reporting. Severity of harassment was expected to significantly influence subjects' perceptions with greater severity resulting in a stronger tendency

to view the incident as sexual harassment. Females were expected to attribute more blame to the perpetrator than were males. A curvilinear relationship was also hypothesized for latency of reporting and attributions of blame. The latter hypothesis was based on research in the rape literature which suggested that extremes on either end of the resistance continuum may provoke high attributions of blame. In contrast, victims responding with an intermediate level of resistance may be allotted low blame. In the present study, resistance was operationalized as latency in reporting.

Previous studies have shown that severity of harassment and subject gender affect perceptions of sexual harassment. As incidents become more severe, subjects appear to judge them more negatively. Also, sexual harassment appears to be perceived by females more negatively than by males. The present study confirmed these relationships. Specifically, issues of perception, confidence, intent, character,

believability, punishment, distress, and offensiveness all varied as a function of severity of harassment, and in the expected direction. As severity of harassment increased, subjects appeared to evaluate the perpetrator more negatively.

Although significant gender differences were present, overall, subjects displayed a tendency to perceive Allison in a relatively positive manner and Dr. N in a relatively negative one. In general, college students in the present sample appeared to view incidents of sexual harassment unfavorably.

Contrary to the hypotheses proposed in the present study, no significant differences were found for perceptions of sexual harassment as a function of latency of reporting. One possible explanation for this outcome is the format of the vignettes that subjects read. The vignettes used in this study were presented in an objective, fact-based manner. Each scenario was being related by an unseen, omniscient, third party. Because this format was used, subjects may have been less likely to question

Allison's report. Had the vignette been presented as an allegation and/or had Allison's account been disputed, subjects may have been less likely to allocate blame to the perpetrator. In other words, perhaps the format of the present study's vignettes did not trigger the attributional processes in the subjects, because the vignette left little doubt as to the veracity of the victim's claim.

Social desirability may also have affected subjects' evaluations of the vignettes. The victim in each scenario was easily identified. Because a social taboo exists against blaming the victim, subjects may have refrained from assigning the victim a high level of blame in order to remain "politically correct". Additionally, subjects may have been able to surmise the goals of the study and altered their responses with this in mind.

A third explanation for the present findings is also possible. Anecdotally, individuals who wait to report an incident of sexual harassment usually have their accounts met with suspicion and doubt

by observers. For example, during the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, some observers questioned Anita Hill's allegations, partially on the grounds that she "waited too long" to report the incident. The present investigation assumed that this negative perception was due to latency in reporting; however, observers may actually be using latency of reporting simply as a means of justifying a broader, preconceived notion of blaming the victim.

Future research should include a comparable study in which the vignette is altered. If the victim's account is phrased in a manner open to interpretation, subjects responses may be more generalizable.

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Table 1. Means for Question 3, "How confident are you about your judgment of this incident regarding sexual harassment?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	5.08
Direct Comment	5.31
Fondling	6.51

Table 2. Means for Question 2, "To what extent do you perceive this incident to be sexual harassment?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	5.06
Direct Comment	5.55
Fondling	6.05

Table 3. Means for Question 7, "To what extent do you feel Dr. N is the type of person that usually engages in such behavior?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	5.08
Direct Comment	5.10
Fondling	5.54

Table 4. Means for Question 9, "How believable do you find Allison V's account of the incident?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	5.45
Direct Comment	5.71
Fondling	5.97

Table 5. Means for Question 10, "How much of a penalty do you believe Dr. N should receive?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	3.47
Direct Comment	3.94
Fondling	5.36

Table 6. Means for Question 12, "How upset are you by Dr. N's behavior?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	4.02
Direct Comment	4.30
Fondling	5.44

Table 7. Means for Question 14, "To what extent is Dr. N's behavior offensive?", as a function of severity of harassment.

Severity of Harassment	M
Bantering	4.58
Direct Comment	4.99
Fondling	6.19

Table 8. Means for interaction between subject gender and severity of harassment for Question 1, "How much of the responsibility for this incident do you think belongs to Dr. N?"

Gender	Severity of Harassment					
	Bantering		Direct Comment		Fondling	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Male	5.78	1.68	5.72	1.52	6.56	1.02
Female	6.16	1.33	6.74	.54	6.48	1.13

Table 9. Means for interaction between subject gender and severity of harassment for Question 5, "To what extent do you feel Dr. N intended the behavior?"

Gender	Severity of Harassment					
	Bantering		Direct Comment		Fondling	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Male	5.36	1.29	5.11	1.47	6.00	.78
Female	4.78	1.49	5.82	1.12	6.14	.93

Appendix A

Allison V. is a senior enrolled in a large university. Her lifelong ambition has been to finish her baccalaureate degree. She is currently a full-time student who is working on her senior Honors project under supervision of one of the professors, Dr. N, who has been teaching at the university for several years. Allison requested Dr. N as her supervisor because of his expertise in a specialized area that she wished to study for her Honors project. Each week Allison and Dr. N meet at a regularly scheduled time to discuss Allison's progress in the development of her project.

When Allison arrived for most recent appointment, Dr. N greeted her at the door, commenting, "You're looking especially attractive today!", and offered her a chair beside his desk. Allison, feeling uncomfortable by the remark, immediately sat down and pulled out a list of questions that she wished to cover during the meeting. Midway through the meeting, Dr. N began his response to one of her questions by remarking, "Oh yes, most of you gals have problems with this sort of thing." He then continued with a laugh, "In fact, maybe some intense private study time

Appendix A continued

after hours might help." Again, Allison was uncomfortable, and she quickly went to the next question on her agenda, hoping to finish the meeting as soon as possible.

Several times later in the day, Allison passed Dr. N in the hallway and greeted him briefly without stopping to chat. She was very distressed by their earlier meeting, and thoughts about the incident were on her mind **much of the day***. Several times she considered reporting the incident. **Later in the day**** she asked to meet with the department chairperson to file a complaint about Dr. N's behavior.

***or much of the semester;
much of the year;
alot after graduation.**

****or Later in the semester;
Later that year;
Several years later.**

Appendix B

INSTRUCTIONS: Please carefully read the following scenario. After reading each question, fill in the numbered circle that corresponds to the response you feel is most accurate. ONLY use the circles numbered 1 through 7. DO NOT use the circles numbered 0, 8, or 9! Please note that it is important to read each question carefully. Take time to consider each option before answering.

NOTE: Do NOT put your name on any of the materials.

(1) How much of the responsibility for this incident do you think belongs to Dr. N?

- 1 = Dr. N is not at all responsible
- 2 = Dr. N is a little responsible
- 3 = Dr. N is somewhat responsible
- 4 = Dr. N is equally responsible as Allison V
- 5 = Dr. N is greatly responsible
- 6 = Dr. N is mostly responsible
- 7 = Dr. N is completely responsible

(2) To what extent do you perceive this incident to be sexual harassment?

- 1 = definitely is not sexual harassment
- 2 = probably is not sexual harassment
- 3 = doubt that it is sexual harassment
- 4 = uncertain if it is sexual harassment
- 5 = maybe it is sexual harassment
- 6 = probably is sexual harassment
- 7 = definitely is sexual harassment

(3) How confident are you about your judgment of this incident regarding sexual harassment?

- 1 = not at all confident
- 2 = slightly confident
- 3 = somewhat confident

Appendix B continued

- 4 = moderately confident
- 5 = fairly confident
- 6 = highly confident
- 7 = completely confident

(4) How much of the responsibility for this incident do you think belongs to Allison V?

- 1 = Allison V is not at all responsible
- 2 = Allison V is a little responsible
- 3 = Allison V is somewhat responsible
- 4 = Allison V is equally responsible as Dr. N
- 5 = Allison V is greatly responsible
- 6 = Allison V is mostly responsible
- 7 = Allison V is completely responsible

(5) To what extent do you feel Dr. N intended the behavior?

- 1 = Dr. N definitely did not intend
- 2 = Dr. N probably did not intend
- 3 = Dr. N might not have intended
- 4 = uncertain if Dr. N intended
- 5 = Dr. N might have intended
- 6 = Dr. N probably intended
- 7 = Dr. N definitely did intend

(6) To what extent do you feel Allison V. is the type of person who usually gets into these situations?

- 1 = Allison V definitely is not the type
- 2 = Allison V probably is not the type
- 3 = Allison V possibly is not the type
- 4 = uncertain if Allison V is the type
- 5 = Allison V possibly is the type
- 6 = Allison V probably is the type
- 7 = Allison V definitely is the type

(7) To what extent do you feel Dr. N is the type of person that usually engages in such behavior?

Appendix B continued

- 1 = Dr. N definitely is not the type
 - 2 = Dr. N probably is not the type
 - 3 = Dr. N possibly is not the type
 - 4 = uncertain if Dr. N is the type
 - 5 = Dr. N possibly is the type
 - 6 = Dr. N probably is the type
 - 7 = Dr. N definitely is the type
- (8) To what extent do you feel Allison V. was upset by the incident?
- 1 = Allison V was not at all upset by the incident
 - 2 = Allison V was a little upset by the incident
 - 3 = Allison V was somewhat upset by the incident
 - 4 = uncertain to how upset Allison V was
 - 5 = Allison V was moderately upset by the incident
 - 6 = Allison V was fairly upset by the incident
 - 7 = Allison V was greatly upset by the incident
- (9) How believable do you find Allison V's account of the incident?
- 1 = not at all believable
 - 2 = slightly believable
 - 3 = somewhat believable
 - 4 = moderately believable
 - 5 = fairly believable
 - 6 = highly believable
 - 7 = completely believable
- (10) How much of a penalty do you believe Dr. N should receive?
- 1 = no penalty
 - 2 = verbal reprimand
 - 3 = written reprimand
 - 4 = fine (5% of one year's pay)
 - 5 = one year probation plus fine
 - 6 = one year suspension
 - 7 = termination of job

Appendix B continued

(11) To what extent do you feel the Allison V's
behavior caused the incident?

- 1 = Allison V's behavior definitely did not cause
- 2 = Allison V's behavior probably did not cause
- 3 = Allison V's behavior possibly did not cause
- 4 = uncertain of extent
- 5 = Allison V's behavior might have caused
- 6 = Allison V's behavior probably caused
- 7 = Allison V's behavior definitely caused

(12) How upset are YOU by the Dr. N's behavior?

- 1 = not upset
- 2 = minimally upset
- 3 = mildly upset
- 4 = moderately upset
- 5 = fairly upset
- 6 = highly upset
- 7 = extremely upset

(13) To what extent do you think Dr. N feels remorse?

- 1 = Dr. N definitely is not remorseful
- 2 = Dr. N probably is not remorseful
- 3 = Dr. N possibly is not remorseful
- 4 = uncertain if Dr. N is remorseful
- 5 = Dr. N possibly is remorseful
- 6 = Dr. N probably is remorseful
- 7 = Dr. N definitely is remorseful

(14) To what extent is Dr. N's behavior offensive?

- 1 = not offensive at all
- 2 = minimally offensive
- 3 = mildly offensive
- 4 = moderately offensive
- 5 = fairly offensive
- 6 = highly offensive
- 7 = extremely offensive

(15) What is your gender?

Appendix B continued

- 1 = male
- 2 = female

(16) How old are you?

- 1 = 18-19
- 2 = 20-21
- 3 = 22-23
- 4 = 24-25
- 5 = 26+

(17) What is your race/ethnicity?

- 1 = American Indian or Alaskan Native
- 2 = Black (non-Hispanic origin)
- 3 = White (non-Hispanic origin)
- 4 = Hispanic
- 5 = Asian or Pacific Islander
- 6 = Non-resident alien
- 7 = Other (specify)_____